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Safer Sex, Social Gatherings, and Mpox

WHAT TO KNOW

Mpox can spread in different ways, including through close contact (including intimate or sexual contact) with a person with mpox.

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How can a person lower their risk during sex?

Vaccination is an important tool in preventing the spread of mpox. JYNNEOS is a two-dose vaccine developed to protect against mpox. Getting both doses provides the best protection against mpox. People who have only received one dose should receive a second dose, even if it has been longer than 28 days since their first dose. If you are at risk for mpox but haven't received your two-dose vaccine yet, temporarily changing some parts of your sex life might reduce the risk of exposure to the virus.

Safer sex and mpox

Reducing or avoiding behaviors that increase risk of mpox exposure is also important when you are between your first and second shots of vaccine. Your protection will be highest two weeks after your second dose of vaccine.

Make a habit of exchanging contact information with any new partner to allow for sexual health follow-up, if needed.

Talk with your partner about any mpox symptoms and be aware of any new or unexplained rash or lesion on either of your bodies, including the mouth, genitals (penis, testicles, vulva, or vagina), or anus (butthole). If you or your partner has or recently had mpox symptoms, or you have a new or unexplained rash anywhere on your body, do not have sex and see a healthcare provider. In some cases, symptoms may be mild, and some people may not even know they have mpox.

If you or a partner has mpox or think you may have mpox, the best way to protect yourself and others is to avoid sex of any kind (oral, anal, vaginal) and kissing or touching each other's bodies while you are sick. **Especially avoid touching any rash**. Do not share things like towels, fetish gear, sex toys, and toothbrushes.

Advice to decrease the risk of mpox while sexually active

Even if you feel well, here are some ways to reduce your chances of being exposed to mpox if you are sexually active:

- Take a temporary break from activities that increase exposure to mpox until you are two weeks after your second dose. This will greatly reduce your risk.
- Limit your number of sex partners to reduce your likelihood of exposure.
- Spaces like back rooms, saunas, sex clubs, or private and public sex parties, where intimate, often anonymous sexual contact with multiple partners occurs—are more likely to spread mpox.
- Condoms (latex or polyurethane) may protect your anus (butthole), mouth, penis, or vagina from exposure to mpox. However, condoms alone may not prevent all exposures to mpox since the rash can occur on other parts of the body.
- Gloves (latex, polyurethane, or nitrile) might also reduce the possibility of exposure if inserting fingers or hands into the vagina or the anus. The gloves must cover all exposed skin and be removed carefully to avoid touching the outer surface.
- Avoid kissing or exchanging spit since mpox can spread this way.
- Masturbate together at a distance without touching each other and without touching any rash.
- Have virtual sex with no in-person contact.
- Consider having sex with your clothes on or covering areas where rash is present, reducing as much skin-to-skin contact as possible. Leather or latex gear also provides a barrier to skin-to-skin contact; just be sure to change or clean clothes/gear between partners and after use.
- Be aware that mpox can also spread through respiratory secretions with close, face-to-face contact.
- Remember to wash your hands, fetish gear, sex toys, and any fabrics (bedding, towels, clothes) after having sex. Learn more about infection control.

What should a person do if they have a new or unexplained rash or other symptoms?

- Avoid sex or being intimate with anyone until you have been checked out by a healthcare provider.
- If you don't have a provider or health insurance, visit a public health clinic near you.
- When you see a healthcare provider, wear a mask, and remind them that this virus is circulating in the area.
- Avoid gatherings, especially if they involve close, personal, skin-to-skin contact.

Think about the people you have had close, personal, or sexual contact during the last 21 days, including people you met through dating apps. To help stop the spread, you might be asked to share this information if you have received an mpox diagnosis.

How can a person lower the chance of getting mpox at places like raves, parties, clubs, and festivals?

When thinking about how to lower the chance of getting mpox at places like raves, parties, clubs, and festivals:

- Seek out information about mpox in your area from trusted sources like your local health department.
- Vaccination is an important tool in stopping the spread of mpox. Get your two-dose vaccine before attending any gathering where mpox may be present.
- Consider how much close, personal, skin-to-skin contact is likely to occur at the event you plan to attend.
- If you feel sick or have a rash, do not attend any gathering, and see a healthcare provider.

How to lower the risk of mpox in public spaces

All social gatherings are not the same:

- Festivals, events, and concerts where attendees are fully clothed and unlikely to share skin-to-skin contact are safer. However, attendees should be mindful of activities (like kissing) that might spread mpox.
- A rave, party, or club where there is minimal clothing and where there is direct, personal, often skin-to-skin contact has some risk. Avoid any rash you see on others and consider minimizing skin-to-skin contact.
- Enclosed spaces, such as back rooms, saunas, sex clubs, or private and public sex parties where intimate, often anonymous sexual contact with multiple partners occurs, may have a higher likelihood of spreading mpox.

Resources

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